GUIDE TO THE SS19 YARURO FILE

[The Yaruro, or Pumeh as they call themselves, were located on the savannas or llanos of Southern Venezuela, approximately between 6° 30' - 7° 30' N. latitude and 67° - 69° 30' W. longitude. The bulk of the population lived along the banks of the Capanaparo River and one of its tributaries, the Riecito, with some dispersed groups living north of the Capanaparo on the Arauca, the Cunaviche, and neighboring rivers, and to the south on the banks of the Orinoco between the mouths of the Capanaparo and the Cinaruco and near the rivers located between the Capanaparo, the Riecito, and the Cinaruco (5: LeBesnerais, p. 1). In the literature the Yaruro frequently were referred to as Saururi (Gumilla), Zavuri (Gilii), and more recently as Jaruros and Sayuros. Jaruro is a Guahibo word and is the term by which the Yaruro were known to that people.

In LeBesnerais' field study of the Yaruro made in the period of 1947-1950 (see 5: LeBesnerais), the author made an extensive census of the Yaruro population and found that the total group did not exceed 519 individuals (a density of 13 persons per 10 kms.). The breakdown was as follows: from the Orinoco to Madre Vieja Basiliero, the population was 220 individuals (a density of 10 persons per 10 kms.); from Madre Vieja Basiliero to Riecito, the population was 83 individuals (a density of 20.5 persons per 10 kms.); from Riecito to Caribe, 134 individuals (a density of 24.5 persons per 10 kms.); and on the Riecito alone, 82 individuals (a density of 9.0 persons per 10 kms.). On the basis of LeBesnerais' demographic study, including data on birth and mortality rates, there is a strong indication that the Yaruro population is rapidly declining.

Linguistically the Yaruros do not seem to have been connected with any other South American group. If Greenberg's tentative classification of the language was correct, the Yaruro were related to the Jivaro, the Cofan, the extinct Esmerada speakers, and others who were or are basically agricultural people, through the Esmerada did extensive hunting and fishing as well (7: Leeds, pp. 160-161). Until further investigations are made, the Yaruro language has been classified as part of the Jivaro Division of the Andean-Equatorial Macro-Phylum.

The Yaruro economy is overwhelmingly based on fishing and the capture of such river animals as turtles, crocodiles, and manatees, supplemented by a very limited hunting of land animals and small-scale maize growing. Men gather the hearts and fruits of palm trees and the women collect turtle and crocodile eggs, dig wild roots, and gather seeds.

Camps or settlements are located on sandy river banks or, in the interior, near water holes. The Yaruro live in low hemispherical huts of poles and sticks covered with palm leaves; in the dry season when they are more nomadic they frequently erect even flimsier structures of leafy branches stuck in the ground. The camp group and primary economic unit was the matrilocal extended family. This group recognized a headman, who, however, had very little real authority. The camp group was important in all matter of economic activities, but it was the moiety that predominated in social affairs. Each moiety had its own chief who in all cases doubled as the group's shaman. Every member of Yaruro society was born into either the Itciai or Puaná moiety. Descent, with its social affinities, prerogatives, and obligations, was traced through the female line, with the child belonging to its mother's moiety. Nothing was inherited

from the father, who belonged to the opposite moiety, except obligations (1: Petrullo, p. 215). Because of these moiety affiliations, the headman of the family camp or hunting group was socially a stranger to most of the people around him, for if he had no sisters or had sisters without sons and had no brothers living with him, then socially he was almost out of place in the family group. There was no inheritance of the position of chief or shaman among the Yaruro, but, in theory, if the nephew of a headman showed particular leadership qualities, he might inherit his uncle's position; in actual practice, the individual who showed a specific aptitude for leadership was chosen to fill the position. The Puaná moiety took precedence over the Itciai, and its chief was usually considered the chief of the entire Yaruro group.

Marriage was monogamous, and exogamous with respect to both the local group and the matrilineal moieties into which the Yaruro were divided, although polygynous and polyandrous marriages did take place at times. Polyandry was of the fraternal type and included parallel cousins. Both the sororate and levirate were practiced.

Inheritance and succession had a matrilineal bias, and kinship terminology was of the modified Crow type.

The Yaruro had a well developed cosmology, which was coupled with a belief in a supreme goddess of creation, Kuma, the wife of the Sun. Deities associated with Kuma and subject to her laws were Puaná, Itciai, and Hatchawa. Kuma was represented neither as an indulgent mother nor as an entirely benevolent creature in Yaruro mythology. It was

Hatchawa and Puana who favored human beings. Shamanism was an important part of the religion of the Yaruro and at one time there were both male and female practitioners. Their primary function was to cure the sick through spirit possession and magical curing rites.

The SS19 Yaruro file consists of seven sources, five in English and two translations from the French (5: LeBesnerais and 6: LeBesnerais). A general orientation source for the file is 1: Petrullo, which, although imcomplete and based on only three months fieldwork during the period of 1933-1934, does contain some basic background material on the Yaruro, especially on religion, mythology, art, and technology. The source is generally useful but not uniformly excellent in quality. The researcher should supplement his reading of 1: Petrullo with more recent ethnographic data found in 2: Leeds, 4: Leeds, 5: LeBesnerais, and 6: LeBesnerais. In addition to the general ethnographic data found in 2: Leeds, the source is primarily concerned with the relationship between a specific ecological system (here incipient tropical forest agriculture) and the resulting cultural pattern. In 3: Leeds the author presents and develops the hypothesis that the relatively weak position of chieftainship among the Yaruro is dependent or based upon their ecological development. 4: Leeds is an attempt to show the relationship between Yaruro socio-economic organization and their ideology, and to isolate from their ideological system various aspects or factors which could be used for comparative purposes in cross-cultural research. In addition to the general ethnographic data found in 5 and 6: LeBesnerais, there is some very specific information on house types, settlement patterns, diseases, and statistics on various aspects of Yaruro demography. 7: Leeds presents a critical evaluation of the ethnographic data presented by Petrullo and others regarding Yaruro horticulture, the existence of matrilineal clans, clan exogamy, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, and totemism.

As a whole the SS19 Yaruro file presents a rather "bare bones" study of Yaruro ethnography. It presents several hypotheses and theories on Yaruro socio-cultural development, but is weak on solid factual data. All sources in the file were written by professional anthropologists from primary fieldwork or a combination of fieldwork and secondary source materials, with the exception of 1: Petrullo as previously noted. The depth of field coverage is rather shallow in this file, being three months in 1933-1934 for Petrullo, roughly one year for Leeds (1958), and approximately three years (1947-1950) for LeBesnerais. The file was processed between 1955-1966.]